

Carbondale Becomes an Incorporated City

By S. Robert Powell, President, Carbondale Historical Society and Museum

On March 15, 1851, the “village” of Carbondale, with 5,000 residents, became and incorporated “city” of the third class. That transformation was made possible by Philo Callender Gritman, one of the most civic-minded and public-spirited individuals in the entire history of Carbondale.

He was born in Sherburne, NY, on October 29, 1828, and with the Gritman family moved to Dundaff in 1829, where his father, Dr. William Gritman, practiced medicine. As a young man, P. C. Gritman began his study of law. In 1847, the Gritman family moved to Carbondale, where P. C. Gritman taught in the Carbondale Academy and Lackawanna Institute, in Temperance Hall at the corner of Church Street and Salem Avenue.

At the same time, Gritman continued to read law and entered the law office of D. N. Lathrope, Carbondale's first lawyer. In 1848, he completed his law course and was admitted to the bar of Luzerne County at Wilkes-Barre, and later, when Lackawanna County was established, he was admitted to the Lackawanna County bar. In the second year of his law practice, he formed a partnership with Samuel Hodgdon.

Gritman, who also trained as a civil engineer, was the key figure in the incorporation of the city of Carbondale in 1851 as a city of the third class. To him was given the privilege of outlining the boundaries of the City of Carbondale and the marking of the boundary lines of the several wards, for which he was paid \$15. As the decision to make application for a charter was somewhat belated it was necessary to act quickly if the City's petition for a charter was to be heard by the legislature of 1851. With that in mind, and disregarding both the end-of-the-year spirit that moved the people at the time to participate in the festivities of the season as well as the knee-deep snow on the ground, P. C. Gritman set out, on New Year's day of that year, accompanied by Townsend Poore, of Scranton, and Thomas Hurley, as chain-boys, and delineated the City's limits before the day was over.

Thanks to the enlightened and civic-minded generosity of the descendants of P. C. Gritman, the original Carbondale city seal, created at the time of the City's incorporation in 1851, is today among the historic artifacts in the collections of the Carbondale Historical Society.

P. C. Gritman's worth and usefulness to the community were attested to after Carbondale became a city when he was elected district attorney in the Carbondale Mayor's Court, succeeding George W. Perkins, the first official. His term was from 1856 to 1859, which was followed by two more terms, 1862-1865, 1869-1871.

He was likewise city attorney for several terms and served on the City's Select and Common Councils. He was later elected for two terms, beginning in 1857, to represent Luzerne County in the Pennsylvania legislature.

During the Civil War, his patriotic spirit was shown, in September 1862, when he was named captain of the Luzerne Artillorists, a Carbondale state militia company of 50 men, that was called

to Harrisburg when the commonwealth was invaded by the Confederates.

On August 25, 1852. P. C. Gritman and Jane Ball, the eldest daughter of William Ball and Mary Ann Smith, were married. William Ball served for many years as the superintendent of motive power and the first master mechanic of the D&H Gravity Railroad. William Ball came to Carbondale in the 1820s from New York City with five other young men to erect the first engines on the Gravity Railroad planes out of Carbondale. He served as the first engineer on Plane No. 1 when the road opened on October 9, 1829.

Philo C. Gritman died on February 10, 1903. His earthy remains are interred in the Gritman plot in Maplewood Cemetery. The Gritman house in Carbondale still stands today. In recent years, it served as the Joseph W. Scotchlas Funeral Home on North Main Street.

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